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Perkins, Brandon

From: Russ Maddox [russmaddox@yahoo.com]
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To: Garcia, Lisa; Grass, Running; Perkins, Brandon
Subject: News from Fairbanks- audio of radio piece at link

Borough Mayor Urges State, Feds to Hasten Response to Groundwater Contamination

<http://fm.kuac.org/post/borough-mayor-urges-state-feds-hasten-response-groundwater-contaminationShare>

By Tim Ellis

Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor Luke Hopkins is calling for action on the sulfolane groundwater contamination problem in the North Pole area. The mayor is proposing that the state begin work now on cleaning up the industrial solvent that leaked from the North Pole refinery for more than a decade. And the mayor is asking the federal government to help expand North Pole's municipal water system to provide clean water to all area residents.

Hopkins says he asked officials with the federal Environmental Protection Agency two weeks ago during a trip to Washington, D.C., to help local governments pay for an expansion of North Pole's water system, a project that's estimated to cost \$30 million.



[Enlarge image](#)

Credit Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Flint Hills Resources' refinery in North Pole.

The mayor says he talked with high-ranking EPA officials in hopes of kick-starting the process.

"If you don't raise the issue to the upper-echelons of EPA, y'know you may not be heard," Hopkins said. "That was the purpose of my trying to get a meeting while I was in Washington, D.C."

Hopkins says he believes he succeeded in getting officials at EPA headquarters to understand more about the urgency of the situation.

"I would say that they are also concerned with what the outcome is going to be for cleanup," he said.



[Enlarge image](#)

Credit Fairbanks North Star Borough

Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor Luke Hopkins

Hopkins says the officials encouraged him, although they also told him there isn't much federal money for such projects these days. They told him among other things that funding cutbacks mandated through the federal budget sequester will delay testing on the impact of sulfolane on human health, about which little is known.

A spokesperson with EPA's regional office in Seattle said in an e-mail Friday that she couldn't provide more information on Hopkins requests, because agency personnel were unavailable due in part to sequester furloughs.



Hopkins says he understands that it takes time and money to determine the extent of the sulfolane contamination and its potential health hazards. But he says that shouldn't keep the state DEC from starting to clean up the contamination, using among other things the so-called "air-sparging" technique that involves injecting oxygen into the groundwater to help dissipate the sulfolane. DEC officials say tests conducted at Flint Hills refinery over the past year have yielded promising results, despite concerns that have been raised over the cost of the technique.

"Now that we know that it had good results. I hope that DEC and EPA get the message that let's get going for someone's private property. And, again, it's expensive – I got that – but let's do something for that area of the borough that's contaminated."

Flint Hills officials said earlier this year that because of the promising test results, they would build an air-sparging facility on the refinery, to limit the movement of sulfolane. But Flint Hills spokesman Jeff Cook said Friday that refinery officials are now working with DEC on an alternative plan that Cook says would achieve the same goal.

Hopkins says DEC should begin setting up several air-sparging facilities around North Pole as soon as possible – especially now that the agency has determined the size and northward movement of the plume of sulfolane in the groundwater.

Tamara Cardona, who heads up DEC's contamination cleanup project, says testing has shown that the area of greatest sulfolane concentration near the middle of the plume appears to be moving down-gradient, away from the refinery and northward toward Fairbanks.

"It looks like there's this mass of contamination that's higher than the general area of the plume," Cardona said. "There's a mass in the middle, which is expected from most contaminant plumes – there's just a higher concentration area. And that seems to be moving a little bit father from the refinery."

Cardona says that movement should slow or stop after cleanup of the sulfolane begins.

"What we need is for cleanup to begin and for cleanup to occur, so that this movement stops. And that's the goal," she said.

Cardona says DEC should have a cleanup plan prepared by 2015. But she couldn't say how long it'll take to clean up the sulfolane contamination.

Cardona says she and other experts will talk about the sulfolane contamination in two open-house meetings to be held Tuesday morning and afternoon at North Pole City Hall.